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FBI told Mitchell of Park role in '71

By James Coates

Chicago Tribune Press Service

WASHINGTON—Former Atty. Gen. John Mitchell disclosed Tuesday that he carried a warning to Capitol Hill in 1971 that Korean agents had infiltrated the House speaker's staff and had launched a bribe scheme aimed at a number of congressmen.

Mitchell, currently on a medical furlough from a prison sentence for his role in the Watergate coverup, said that he received the warning from U.S. intelligence agencies and personally met with House Speaker Carl Albert. Mitchell said he told Albert that an agent controlled by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency was on his staff.

Albert ignored the warning, Mitchell told a House International Relations Subcommittee investigating U.S. Korean ties. Mitchell indicated that the agent on Albert's staff was Suzi Park Thompson.

Mrs. Thompson, a frequent Capitol Hill party-giver linked romantically to a California congressman, remained on Albert's staff until late 1976, when Albert, an Oklahoma Democrat, retired.

NO OTHER congressman received any warning from the attorney general that Korean agents were scheming to buy congressional influence, Mitchell said. The resulting scandal has endangered many careers and badly marred Congress' image.

Documents released Tuesday indicate that both Mitchell and Henry Kissinger, the Nixon administration's national security adviser, were told details of the Korean plans by an unidentified U.S. spy agency. The spy agency obtained the details covertly.

Heavily censored Federal Bureau of Investigation memos show that most details of the Korean scheme were known by the fall of 1971. That information has only recently become generally known.

ONE OF THE documents released Tuesday indicates that Korean President Park Chung Hee was "directly involved" in contributing "several hundred thousand dollars" to the Democratic Party.

That is a new allegation. The source is a memo from the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, which FBI files show was sent to both Mitchell and Kissinger marked "eyes only," meaning that no subordinate should read it.

Mitchell said under oath Tuesday that he had never seen the memo mentioning payoffs to the Democratic Party, even though FBI files indicate he received it.

Mitchell said he was certain he did not see the memo. He pointed out that as manager of the 1972 Republican presidential campaign, he could have used the information against the Democrats.

MITCHELL WAS convicted in 1975 for the cover-up of the Nixon administration's involvement in the 1972 burglary of the Democratic National Committee offices at the Watergate office building.

Kissinger is tentatively scheduled to testify Wednesday about the same memorandum. Rep. Donald Fraser [D., Minn.], chairman of the House subcommittee, has said he wants to determine why the White House did not warn congressmen in time to avoid the scandal.

Mitchell answered that question Tuesday by saying that as attorney general he decided "we were dealing with a separate and discrete arm of government. They [Congress] should take care of their own problems."

Fraser produced three Hoover memos addressed to Mitchell and Kissinger. Mitchell acknowledged seeing only the memo mentioning that Korean agents had found jobs on two congressional staffs.

MITCHELL DENIED that he had seen the memo referring to Korean contributions to Democrats or another document indicating that a U.S. congressman — his identity censored by Fraser — helped the Koreans plan their influence-buying scheme.

The second memo says that the congressman met with Korean President Park and urged him to place Korean businessman Tongsun Park in charge of "influence-lobbying efforts in the United States."

TESTIMONY BEFORE Fraser's subcommittee Tuesday by a former FBI official disclosed that the bureau had first investigated Korean activities in Washington in 1968.

The early investigation disclosed that CIA analysts had concluded that Tongsun Park and other Koreans were conducting a Korean lobbying operation on Capitol Hill.

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